

Reconsidering and Critiquing Russian Eurasianism: Historical, Philosophical, and Ideological Dimensions

Javanshir Feyziyev Eyyub oglu

PhD in Philosophy

Science Doctoral Student, Institute of Philosophy,

National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan

Member of the National Assembly (Parliament) of the Republic of Azerbaijan

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Abstract

This article provides a critical and comprehensive examination of **Russian Eurasianism** and its contemporary reinterpretation in **neo-Eurasianism**, positioning them within the broader historical, philosophical, and geopolitical frameworks of imperial Russian thought. It engages deeply with the seminal works of Russian ideologues and philosophers such as **Nikolay Danilevsky**, **Nikolay Trubetskoy**, **Pavel Savitsky**, **Lev Gumilev**, **Alexander Panarin**, and **Alexander Dugin**, evaluating how each contributed to the evolution of Eurasianist ideology. The study argues that Russian Eurasianism constitutes not merely a regionalist or civilizational discourse but a **politico-ideological project** aimed at legitimizing Russia's historical and ongoing **hegemonic aspirations** across Eurasia.

The paper maintains that from its inception, Eurasianism has been characterized by **epistemological asymmetry and geopolitical bias**, serving to rationalize Russian imperial expansionism under the guise of cultural unity. Through historical analysis, the article traces the transformation of Russian self-identity—from the **imperial ambitions of Tsarist Russia**, through the **ideological construct of Soviet internationalism**, to the **neo-imperial revivalism of post-Soviet Russia**—demonstrating that the core imperial principle of Eurasian dominance has remained largely unaltered.

Furthermore, the study situates the Eurasianist narrative in the **context of globalization and post-Cold War regionalism**, emphasizing the ideological contradictions inherent in Russia's dual self-identification as both **European and Asian**. The author argues that a sustainable Eurasian geopolitical order requires the **renunciation of absolute dominance** and the adoption of cooperative regionalism among Turkic and Central Asian states. Without such reorientation, neo-Eurasianism risks perpetuating outdated imperial paradigms incompatible with contemporary principles of **multipolarity, sovereignty, and intercivilizational dialogue**.

Keywords: Eurasia; Russian Eurasian Policy; globalization; Pan-Slavism; Turkic states; neo-Eurasianism; geopolitical ideology.

Main Text (excerpt)

The victory of Russia in the **Great Northern War** and the subsequent fragmentation of the **Golden Horde** at the beginning of the eighteenth century transformed **Eurasia** into a vast geopolitical battlefield. Declaring itself an empire in **1721**, Russia strategically exploited the weakening of Turkic polities across all fronts. Having secured control over the **Black Sea** and **Caspian Sea**, the Russian Empire expanded toward **Iran** and **China**, using the **Caucasus** and **Central Asia** as corridors of imperial advance. By **1905**, the empire had reached its historical zenith—covering over **22.5 million square kilometers**, stretching from the **Arctic Ocean** to the **Black Sea**, the **Baltic Sea**, and the **Pacific Ocean**.

This historical trajectory—marked by the decline of Turkic states and the consolidation of Russian power—shifted the geopolitical balance decisively in favor of Russia. The imperial expansion led not only to the annexation of vast territories but also to the **systematic suppression of Turkic sovereignty** through demographic and administrative Russification. The ideological and political evolution that followed—culminating in the establishment of the **Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)**—projected Russia's hegemony globally, positioning it as one of the poles in the **bipolar international system** of the twentieth century.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, five of its **fourteen successor republics** emerged as independent **Turkic states**, each with deep traditions of statehood and civilizational continuity. The disintegration of the USSR created both a **vacuum and an opportunity** for reconfiguring Eurasian geopolitics. In this historical juncture, **neo-Eurasianism** re-emerged within the **Russian Federation**, seeking to reclaim Russia's imperial identity in a post-Soviet context. Yet, despite its modernized rhetoric, **neo-Eurasianism remains fundamentally a continuation of the classical Eurasianist doctrine**—a vision of Russian dominance cloaked in the language of civilizational pluralism.

Classical Eurasianism—anchored in the ideological legacies of **Pan-Slavism** and **Slavophilism**—was designed to reconcile Russia's contradictory orientations toward **Europe and Asia**, while simultaneously asserting Russia's distinct civilizational mission. Thinkers such as **Nikolay Berdyaev** associated this “dualism” with Russia's historical uncertainty and spiritual ambivalence between East and West [2, p. 18]. Likewise, **Pyotr Chaadayev** observed that “Russia belongs to neither East nor West; it is outside of both, owning none of their traditions” [12, p. 508]. Later, **Fyodor Dostoevsky** famously remarked, “We are Tatars in Europe and Europeans in Asia” [4, p. 509], underscoring the hybrid nature of Russian identity and its perception of the Turkic and Tatar peoples as the essence of Eurasian civilization.

By the late nineteenth century, **Pan-Slavic thinkers** such as **Nikolay Danilevsky** had crystallized the ideological foundations of Eurasianism. In *Russia and Europe* (1862), Danilevsky declared that “Europeanism is the illness of Russian life” and that salvation lies in struggle against the West [3, pp. 323, 529]. He classified Europe as belonging to the **Aryan** family, and Asia to the **Semitic and Turanian (Turkic)** families [3, p. 370]. For Danilevsky, Europe's hostility was directed not against Muslims or Turks but against **Slavs**, with the West continuously seeking to embroil **Turkey**, the leader of the Turkic world, against **Russia**, the

leader of the Slavic world [3, pp. 400–401]. His ultimate objective was the seizure of **Constantinople (Istanbul)**—the spiritual capital of Orthodoxy and the imagined center of a **Pan-Slavic Union** [3, pp. 467–470].

This imperial utopia—reviving Byzantium and making “Tsargrad” the capital of the Slavic world—symbolized the **imperialist imagination of Russia**, which aspired to rule from **Europe’s borders to the frontiers of the Turkic East**. The same expansionist logic continues to underpin **modern Eurasianism**, where the rhetoric of civilizational unity conceals an enduring project of **strategic domination**.

The Ideological Consolidation of Eurasianism and Its Evolution toward Neo-Eurasianism

The consolidation of **Eurasianism** as a coherent doctrine emerged from its transition beyond **Pan-Slavism**, developing new dimensions of **Russian fundamentalist geopolitics**. While Pan-Slavism primarily sought to unify Slavic nations under Russian leadership, classical Eurasianism extended this ambition by embedding Russia within the broader civilizational framework of the **Eurasian landmass**, simultaneously positioning it as the natural mediator and hegemon between East and West. This shift was not merely geographical but **civilizational and metaphysical**, reflecting Russia’s perceived historical mission to transcend both European rationalism and Asian mysticism.

One of the first to conceptualize Russia as a distinctly Eurasian entity was **Vladimir Lamansky**, whose seminal work *Three Worlds of the Asia-Europe Continent* (1892) introduced a tripartite understanding of continental identity. Rejecting the simplistic dichotomy of Europe and Asia as two separate continents divided by the Ural Mountains, Lamansky proposed instead the existence of **three interconnected civilizational zones: Europe, Eurasia, and Asia**. He argued that Russia occupies the geographical and spiritual nexus that “connects these three worlds,” thereby discovering its authentic identity in this **liminal zone of synthesis and mediation**. His ideas provided the embryonic framework for viewing Russia not as a periphery of Europe but as the **geopolitical and cultural axis of the Eurasian supercontinent**.

Lamansky’s intellectual contemporary, **Konstantin Leontyev**, advanced this vision by asserting that Russia’s destiny lay decisively with Asia rather than Europe. He called for a conscious **repudiation of European orientation**, arguing that Russia should embrace its Turanian roots and “belong more to the Turan world than to the Slavic” [13, p. 3]. The invocation of the “Turan world”—a term historically associated with the **Turkic and Mongolic peoples of Central Eurasia**—revealed an implicit recognition within Russian thought that the **essence of Eurasia** was not Slavic but **Turko-Mongolic**. This paradox would later haunt Russian Eurasianist ideology, which simultaneously appropriated and subordinated the very civilizational components it claimed as its foundation.

A more systematic and philosophical articulation of **classical Eurasianism** was developed by **Prince Nikolay Trubetskoy**, who redefined the historical narrative of Russia from an **eastern perspective**, rather than through the Eurocentric lens that had dominated its historiography. “The history of Russia,” he wrote, “should be reviewed from the East rather than from the

West” [11]. Trubetskoy conceptualized Eurasia as a **distinct cultural-historical organism**, unified by a “custom civilization” formed through the symbiosis of numerous ethnic and linguistic groups inhabiting the region. His analysis was revolutionary in its claim that the political and cultural coherence of Eurasia predated modern Russia, tracing its lineage to the **imperial system established by Genghis Khan**.

Trubetskoy argued that the **Great Turk-Mongol Empire** created by Genghis Khan had already laid the **geopolitical foundation of Eurasian integrity**. He claimed that “this modern state called Russia, or the USSR in the 1920s, is part of the Great Turk-Mongol Empire established by Genghis Khan... Russia’s geographical territory coincides with the core area of this empire. Russian statehood within the territory of Eurasia is both the heir and successor of Genghis Khan’s state, just as the Duke of Moscow was the heir of the Golden Horde.” Going further, he posited a **biological and cultural inheritance**, writing that “as the Ugro-Finnic and all Slavic nations, the Turkic blood runs through the veins of Russians... our brothers (not by language or religion, but by blood, character, and culture) are not only Slavonians but also Turanians” [11, pp. 14–36].

Trubetskoy’s arguments reveal the **ideological elasticity** of Eurasianism. In claiming **blood kinship with the Turkic and Turanian peoples**, Russia sought to neutralize the historical and political antagonism of its Turkic subjects, transforming conquest into a form of **civilizational inheritance**. This ideological maneuver legitimized Russian imperial expansion as the **continuation of a pan-Eurasian legacy**, thereby reframing domination as historical succession.

The institutionalization of Eurasianist thought occurred after the **collapse of the Russian Empire (1917)**, when the doctrine was rearticulated by Russian émigré intellectuals dispersed across Europe. In 1932, the *Eurasian Party* was formally founded abroad, led by figures such as **Pyotr Savitsky**, who provided the movement with theoretical coherence and political ambition. Savitsky elaborated the geopolitical logic of Eurasianism, developing it from speculative philosophy into a **pragmatic doctrine of imperial restoration**. For Savitsky, Russia’s “**continental sense**”, derived from its historical symbiosis with the Asian steppe peoples, endowed it with a **natural right and mission to dominate the Eurasian heartland** [10, p. 155]. His vision thus merged the **spatial determinism of Mackinder’s Heartland theory** with a metaphysical belief in Russia’s civilizational exceptionalism.

During the **Soviet era**, overt expressions of Eurasianism were largely suppressed by the **official Marxist-Leninist ideology**, which prioritized class struggle over civilizational discourse. Yet the essential **imperial logic of territorial expansion and cultural absorption** persisted under the guise of proletarian internationalism. As many scholars have noted, Soviet “fraternal assistance” policies and the rhetoric of socialist solidarity often masked a **continuation of the Eurasian hegemonic project**, albeit in a secularized and ideologically camouflaged form.

The **collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991** marked a decisive moment for the **revival of Eurasianist thought**, which re-emerged openly and doctrinally as **neo-Eurasianism** [13, pp. 3–6]. Although framed in the language of post-bipolar multipolarity and civilizational dialogue, **neo-Eurasianism retained the ideological DNA of its classical antecedent**—the conviction that

Russia is the organizing axis of Eurasia and the guarantor of its unity. The difference lies primarily in historical circumstance: whereas the early Eurasianists theorized from imperial confidence, neo-Eurasianism arose from **post-imperial trauma**, seeking to intellectually rationalize Russia's geopolitical losses and to restore its influence among the newly independent republics.

Contemporary neo-Eurasianism thus serves as both **an ideological response and a strategic instrument**. Having “let the allied republics slip through its fingers,” Russia, for the first time in its history, elevated Eurasianism from a marginal intellectual current to a **central pillar of national policy**. Under this framework, the ideology evolved along **four interrelated trajectories**:

1. **Scientific-theoretical and cultural-philosophical discourse**, where Eurasianism is framed as a civilizational and geopolitical paradigm;
2. **Public and political movements**, which employ Eurasianist rhetoric to promote integrationist narratives across the former Soviet space;
3. **Political party ideologies**, particularly those aligned with nationalist and conservative thought, embedding Eurasianism into policy agendas; and
4. **The official state policy of Vladimir Putin's administration**, which strategically reappropriates Eurasianist concepts to legitimize regional dominance and reassert Russia's status as a **continental power**.

In these four spheres, neo-Eurasianism has transitioned from **academic speculation to operative ideology**, reinforcing the continuity of **imperial geopolitics under a postmodern guise**.

The Reconfiguration of Neo-Eurasianism in Russian Geopolitical Thought: From Panarin to Dugin

The challenges faced by the **Russian state** in maintaining and expanding its geopolitical power amid changing historical and political realities constitute a **core concern of “modern” Eurasianist ideologues**. These theorists—positioned within both intellectual and policy-making circles—seek to reinterpret Russia's declining influence as a call for ideological renewal, transforming the notion of *Eurasia* into both a **strategic counter-concept** and a **civilizational alternative** to Western liberal globalization.

A. Alexander Panarin and the Geopolitical Counter-Narrative to Atlanticism

One of the most influential figures in the philosophical institutionalization of neo-Eurasianism was **Alexander Sergeyevich Panarin**, head of the *Center for Social and Philosophical Research* at the *Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences*. Through works such as *Russia in the Cycles of World History*, *Global Political Prognostication*, and *The Temptation of Globalism* [8; 6; 7], Panarin conceptualized Russian Eurasianism as a **civilizational and geopolitical alternative** to Western “Atlanticism.” His project sought to provide a philosophical foundation for Russia's **post-Soviet revival** as a

global power—an heir to both the **Russian Empire** and the **Soviet Union**—aiming once again to achieve regional and eventually planetary dominance.

Panarin's writings oscillate between **diagnosis and prescription**. He concedes that "Russia is getting destructed" [6, p. 78], but nonetheless constructs a quasi-messianic narrative of **national resurrection**. Through a form of speculative geopolitical reasoning, he situates Russia within what he calls a "**triple rivalry**" of Eurasian projects:

1. The *Northern (Russian) project*, centered on Moscow;
2. The *Muslim project*, associated with *Pan-Turkism*; and
3. The *Chinese project*, linked to the revival of the *Great Silk Road*.

Panarin argues that the latter two projects—Muslim and Chinese—represent **attempts to connect the Atlantic and Pacific oceans while bypassing Russia**, thus marginalizing it from the core networks of global trade and energy distribution. He emphasizes that both of these rival projects focus on the **Caspian basin's vast oil resources**, positioning Russia in a defensive stance [6, p. 163]. In Panarin's vision, only the "**Northern**" or **Russian Eurasian project** possesses the civilizational legitimacy and strategic depth necessary to unify the Eurasian continent.

However, his version of **neo-Eurasianism** functions more as a **philosophical justification for political nostalgia** than as a realistic geopolitical program. Panarin's Eurasia becomes a symbolic refuge—a metaphysical "ally" for a Russia "left alone in the desert." Despite predicting a resurgence of global alliances centered on Russian power [6, p. 317], his propositions remain detached from the pragmatic realities of international relations, as the Eurasian arena continues to witness the consolidation of **non-Russian centers of power**.

B. The Political Instrumentalization of Eurasianism

The diffusion of Eurasianist ideology into the platforms of **political parties and social movements** illustrates its transformation from intellectual discourse into a **tool of political mobilization**. Within post-Soviet Russia, Eurasianist rhetoric appeals to **three overlapping constituencies**:

1. The **conservative and nostalgic segments** of society longing for Soviet-era grandeur;
2. The **nationalist factions** advocating radical restoration of Russian superpower status; and
3. The **cosmopolitan elites** seeking to frame Russia's multiethnic composition as a unifying civilizational asset rather than a liability.

In this way, Eurasianism functions as a **flexible ideological instrument**, simultaneously invoking imperial memory, Soviet integrationism, and postmodern pluralism—all converging toward the re-legitimization of **centralized geopolitical authority**.

C. Alexander Dugin and the Doctrinal Codification of Neo-Eurasianism

The figure most responsible for bringing Eurasianism into the forefront of **public and political discourse** is **Alexander Dugin**, a philosopher, political activist, and member of the *Expert Council of the State Duma* of the Russian Federation. Dugin's book *The Eurasian View* articulates the “**main principles of the doctrinal Eurasian platform**”, presenting Eurasianism as both a philosophical worldview and a blueprint for **Russia's geopolitical restoration**.

At the center of Dugin's doctrine lies the conviction that the **West represents a civilizational antithesis to humanity itself**. He explicitly reiterates the classical Eurasianist thesis that “the West is against mankind” [5, p. 6], arguing that nations imitating Western models have inevitably lost their sovereignty and cultural authenticity. For Dugin, Russia's own “**Western-oriented policy**” led directly to its **historical regressions**, culminating in the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the erosion of spiritual identity. The “crisis of ideas in modern Russia,” he insists, originates from this very dependence on the West.

In Dugin's reinterpretation, **globalism** becomes the contemporary face of Western expansionism, and the **struggle against globalism** thus defines the mission of Eurasianism. He proclaims that only Eurasianism can offer an **intellectual and spiritual counter-model** to the unipolar world order. Accordingly, the priorities of the neo-Eurasian movement are twofold:

1. To establish a **Eurasian Union** grounded in the institutional structures of the *Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)* and inspired by the principle of “**Eurasian federalism**”; and
2. To forge an “**axis of allied states**” extending along the geopolitical corridor **Moscow-Tehran-Delhi-Beijing** [5, pp. 14–15].

Through this synthesis of ideology and geopolitics, Dugin envisions the “**Veliko-Russians**” (Great Russians) as the central ethnos capable of creating a “**single nation**” through the intersection of Slavic, Turkic, and Finno-Ugric civilizations. He ambitiously asserts that Eurasianism could evolve into a “**consolidated core of worldview, philosophy, geopolitical project, economic theory, moral movement, and political power,**” culminating in his provocative declaration that “Eurasia is a planet” [5, pp. 34–35].

Yet Dugin's project transcends philosophical speculation and ventures into **political prescription**. He rejects the notion of a confederation of sovereign Eurasian states, proposing instead the formation of a **unitary, federal super-state** rooted in the **Russian Federation's existing institutional structure** [5, pp. 62–69]. His “*Common Eurasian Home*” is envisioned not as a voluntary union but as a **hierarchical integration** of states including **Mongolia, China, Japan, Iran, Afghanistan, and India** [5, pp. 70–76]. The missionary tone of his writings—culminating in the inclusion of the *Charter of the All-Russian Political and Public Movement “Eurasia”*—illustrates his intent to transform ideological conviction into mass mobilization.

It is unsurprising, therefore, that Dugin explicitly aligns his theory with the **state policy of Vladimir Putin**, declaring: “Eurasianists welcome President Putin's policy aimed at strengthening Russian statehood and reviving Russia's geopolitical power” [5, p. 88]. In doing

so, he transforms Eurasianism from a speculative philosophy into a **doctrinal component of Russian strategic discourse**.

D. Institutionalization of the Eurasian Project: From Ideology to Policy

In the twenty-first century, **Eurasianism has transcended intellectual debate** to become a **recognized component of Russia's public policy**. Dissatisfied with the limited integration achieved through the *Commonwealth of Independent States*, Russia began to pursue a more ambitious project—the **Eurasian Union (EAU)**. On **November 12, 2011**, Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan signed the *Declaration on the Establishment of the Eurasian Union*, with **Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan** later approving their candidacy for membership.

The Union's proposed structure echoes earlier integration models: the *Free Trade Zone*, *Eurasian Economic Union*, *Customs Union*, and *Eurasian Economic Community*. According to its architects, the fully realized Eurasian Union would cover **20,030,748 square kilometers**, host a population of approximately **169 million**, and produce a **gross domestic product (GDP) of USD 2.72 trillion**—making it the **sixth-largest economy** globally.

Proponents of the Union envision not merely economic integration but the **reconstruction of geopolitical space**, aspiring to transform the *Eurasian Economic Union* into a “**Greater Eurasian Union**” encompassing **China, India, Iran, and eventually even Europe**. However, such ambitions confront significant legal and ethical challenges. Russian ideologues have controversially proposed admitting **unrecognized or separatist territories** such as *Abkhazia*, *South Ossetia*, *Transnistria*, and *Nagorno-Karabakh* as members—an act that would constitute a **flagrant violation of international law** and directly undermine the sovereignty of UN member states.

The EAU's intellectual lineage reveals a direct continuity between **Soviet integrationism** and **Eurasian neo-imperialism**. As the conversion of “the Soviet Union into the Eurasian Union” and of “communist ideology into Eurasian ideology” unfolds, the **state-level architects**—most prominently **Vladimir Putin** and **Nursultan Nazarbayev**—openly frame the project as the next historical stage of Russia's civilizational mission. Notably, the EAU Declaration followed **Putin's 2011 article**, “*The New Integration Project for Eurasia: The Future That Is Being Born Today*” [9], in which he asserted that the Union would create a power “capable of representing one of the poles of the modern world.”

This declaration encapsulates the **continuity of imperial ambition under a new guise**: a rhetorical transformation from Tsarist expansionism and Soviet socialism to the **postmodern geopolitics of integration**, all under the enduring banner of **Russian Eurasianism**. The question that remains is whether the contemporary international system—rooted in sovereignty, balance of power, and legal equality—will permit the realization of such **hegemonic pretensions**.

Conclusion

A synthetic review of the principal architects and interpreters of Russian Eurasianism—**Lamansky, Leontyev, Trubetskoy, Savitsky, Panarin, and Dugin**, alongside the state-level proponents of the **Eurasian (Economic) Union**—shows a persistent **ideological throughline**: the rebranding of imperial predominance as civilizational vocation. From the classical formulations that recast **Mongol-Turkic imperial legacies** as Russia's own patrimony, to **neo-Eurasianist** programs that code **anti-globalist** resistance as a Eurasian alternative to Atlanticism, the doctrine repeatedly seeks to legitimate **hierarchical integration** of the post-Soviet space under Moscow's tutelage.

This project faces **structural limits**. Historically, Russia's attempts to universalize **Pan-Slavism** faltered not only in Western Europe but also among Slavic nations with strong traditions of statehood (e.g., **Poland, Ukraine**). The broader Eurasian field—especially **Central Asia** and the **Turkic world**—is even less amenable to absorption, given consolidated sovereignties, plural alignments, and a strategic awareness that **“to conquer the Turkic world is to conquer Asia.”** The long mid-20th-century interlude of Soviet predominance (from **1945** into the **1980s**) rested on exceptional conditions—**bipolarity**, military occupation, and ideological bloc discipline—that no longer obtain. Post-1991, the **ideological translation** of Soviet integrationism into **Eurasianism** cannot compensate for the **legal, economic, and normative** constraints of a system that centers **sovereign equality** and diversified regionalism.

As **Trenin** argues, the contemporary international environment encourages nation-states to consolidate **internally** rather than revive **external imperiums**; Russia's most viable horizon lies in **European connectivity** and **rules-based cooperation**, not in post-imperial adventures or **unitary super-state** blueprints. Efforts to fold **separatist territories** into Eurasian schemes collide with **international law** and risk deepening geopolitical isolation. In practical terms, neo-Eurasianism's **grandiloquent metaphysics** and **hegemonic cartography** yield diminishing returns: they alarm neighbors, **crowd out** cooperative initiatives, and invite **counter-balancing coalitions** across both Europe and Asia.

A constructive pathway remains. Russia—already the world's largest country by area—does not need **territorial augmentation**. What it needs is **domestic problem-solving, economic modernization, and multivector partnership** grounded in **consent, reciprocity, and legalism**. Renouncing claims to **absolute dominance** “in Europe and in Asia,” and embracing **plural, treaty-based regionalism** with **Turkic and Central Asian** states, would reposition Russia not as a meta-civilizational hegemon but as a **reliable stakeholder** in a multipolar order. Absent such recalibration, the Eurasianist project—as both **idea** and **instrument**—remains, in Trenin's apt formulation, **spent**: unable to strengthen Russia's position **either in Europe or in Asia**.

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Notes: For Russian-language works, transliteration is provided, followed by an English translation of the title in brackets. Publisher locations are omitted per APA 7 guidance.

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